Al Quds University has been in existence as an academic institution in Jerusalem for over 30 years. It is a leading academic institution in the country and ranks top in the entire Arab world in the number of peer-reviewed publications per faculty member per year. Amongst its many faculties and departments are the first Palestinian schools of law and medicine, museums of mathematics, science and prisoners’ affairs, research centers in nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and environmental sciences, centers for community action, legal aid clinics and an educational television station and media laboratory. It employs approximately 1,300 staff who provide educational services for 13,000 students up to the MA level.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Al Quds has two principal campuses, a larger one in Abu Dis at the edge of Jerusalem, and a smaller “city” campus inside East Jerusalem – in the Old City and its environs – with about 1000 students and numerous institutes and research centres. Over the past decade, the Abu Dis campus has been split from the Jerusalem city campus - the central administration of the University and the colleges and centers located within the Israeli-defined borders of East Jerusalem - by the Separation Wall, leaving these in an increasingly precarious position, both legally and practically.[[2]](#footnote-2) The University has been forced to severely curtail its educational activities in East Jerusalem as a result of the consistent denial of access to both students and professors.

More crucially, the University has been struggling for its very existence, battling the threat of closure by the Israeli authorities for the past fifteen years, both in the Israeli courts – where cases have been brought against it to close it down which are still pending – and through attempts at negotiation with the Israeli authorities. Although Al Quds University is fully accredited and licensed by the relevant Palestinian bodies, and recognized worldwide, the Israeli authorities in East Jerusalem – part of the territories occupied in 1967, and therefore not recognized as part of Israel under international law – have insisted that it submit to Israeli accreditation as an Israeli institution or be closed down and have its administration arrested. However, the Israelis have also not allowed the University to straddle the Israeli-defined “border” between East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank as a single institution, but are forcing it to cut itself in half to survive.[[3]](#footnote-3) The University’s repeated attempts to comply with the Israeli authorities’ requirements have had no success.[[4]](#footnote-4)

This is a pressing problem: Israel’s refusal to recognize Al Quds University degrees means that University graduates cannot work and make a life in Jerusalem, especially in the vital sectors of medicine, health professions, education etc., which are regulated by the Israeli authorities, and in which there is a dire shortage. For instance, it is estimated that there are currently 10,000 school-age children in East Jerusalem without access to school education. The University’s Hind Husseini College for Girls, in Sheikh Jarrah, graduates approximately 50 teachers with BA’s in Education every year – who are then not allowed to teach in Jerusalem schools because their degrees are not recognized by Israel. They can only do so after spending an additional two years at an Israeli institution which provides them with a “Diploma” in Education (which still does not entitle them to the status or salary of university graduates). Similarly, Al Quds University has a preeminent College of Medicine, whose graduate doctors are prevented from practicing in Jerusalem. Not to mention the central role the University plays, as the major remaining Palestinian institution in Jerusalem, in many other essential activities in the city, cultural (through the Centre for Jerusalem Studies, for instance), social (through the Community Action Centre, which provides adult education and legal aid, or the Child Institute, which works with learning disabilities and therapy, etc.), and so on, all of which are under threat.

Al Quds University was therefore forced to apply for accreditation of its “city” campus as a separate institution under Israel's jurisdiction. It did this based on an informal agreement with the Israeli Ministry and Council of Higher Education that, once it had submitted its application, Israel would automatically recognize all of the degrees held by the University’s graduates. Despite the University’s best efforts – and despite hiring the pre-eminent Israeli lawyer in this field, at considerable cost – the application has been delayed for years by the Israeli authorities, far longer than even Israeli law allows. Meanwhile, the Israeli authorities have reneged on their commitment to retroactively recognize the University’s degrees, and the University’s Israeli lawyer has been informed by his contacts at the relevant ministries that the University’s file is being handled by the Prime Minister’s Office.[[5]](#footnote-5) Even if the Israeli authorities do, in the end, recognize the University’s city campus as a separate Israeli-regulated entity in East Jerusalem, this would still leave the University with all the consequences – financial, administrative, etc. – of having been forced to split in two.

Al Quds University has reached the end of its legal recourses. Palestinians living in Jerusalem have a right to an education, and to work and make a life there; and Al Quds University has a right to exist as a university in East Jerusalem.[[6]](#footnote-6) In September 1993, as Israel and the PLO were signing the Oslo Accords, Israel’s Foreign Minister (now President) Shimon Peres made a formal statement to the Knesset, reiterated in his letter to Minister Holst of Norway on October 11, 1993 (quoted): “Therefore, all Palestinian institutions of East Jerusalem, including the economic, social, educational and cultural, and the holy Christian and Moslem places, are performing an essential task for the Palestinian population. Needless to say, we will not hamper their activity; on the contrary, the fulfillment of this important mission is to be encouraged.” The plight of the University ought not to be a political issue – it is a vital one for the inhabitants of our city – but it is one which now can only be resolved by pressure on Israel to respect both international law, especially the right to education, and its own stated commitments, and thus to recognize Al Quds University and the degrees it awards its graduates, and allow it to operate in Jerusalem unhindered.[[7]](#footnote-7)

In the interim, Al Quds University continues to operate under constant and increasing threat. Its premises have been raided more than once by the Israeli army in recent months, including once to impede the launch of a citizen/community journalism project on the campus in the old city (www.honaalquds.net). During this raid, the Israeli army also arrested various University employees and subjected them to hours of intense questioning without charging them with any crime.

1. Please see the University website, [www.alquds.edu](http://www.alquds.edu), for more detail on the University. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Regarding the legal status and effect of the Separation Wall, the International Court of Justice has found that the route chosen for the wall gives expression in loco to the illegal measures taken by Israel with regard to Jerusalem and the settlements, as deplored by the Security Council, and that all States are under an obligation not to recognize the illegal situation resulting from the construction of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem. *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Advisory Opinion, I.C.J. Reports 2004, 136.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Although the Israeli authorities have apparently no trouble in forgetting these distinctions when it comes to deciding to accredit the recent Israeli “university” of the West Bank settlement of Ariel. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Al Quds University actually physically straddles the “border” in any case, as its Abu Dis campus lies both inside and outside the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem. In 2003, when the Separation Wall was being built, it was slated to run through the center of that campus. It took massive peaceful mobilization by the University, and the direct intervention of Secretary Condoleezza Rice, to change the course of the Wall and preserve most of the campus, thereby saving the University. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A petition submitted to the Israeli High Court by 15 medical graduates to allow them to sit the Israeli professional examinations was finally allowed by the Court, after Al Quds University (which was not a party) submitted its papers to show that it had applied for accreditation in Jerusalem from the Israeli authorities. The Court decided to permit the graduates to sit the examinations while specifically limiting the decision to the 15 who had applied until the University’s application for accreditation had been dealt with. The Israeli Health Ministry has thus far refused to comply with the Court decision; Al Quds has been negotiating with the Ministry to get the decision implemented, to no avail. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. There are a myriad legal instruments under international law protecting the right to education generally and under occupation, and even numerous specific UN Resolutions, starting with UNGA Resolution 35/13 B of 3 November 1980, which continuously assert the need to establish and support “the university of Jerusalem “Al-Quds””. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. A question was tabled on this issue in the European Parliament in July 2011 (NO/E-005293/11) by Chris Davies, MEP, to which the European Commission replied that “[t]he EU will follow up this issue closely and will raise it, if necessary, in bilateral contacts with Israeli authorities at an appropriate level.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)